

# Sonbert Films: Common Denominator Is Movement

San Francisco Chronicle 65  
Thurs., Nov. 16, 1978

By Thomas Albright

Warren Sonbert is an independent filmmaker from New York who has lived in San Francisco for several years and is just beginning to win acclaim for his work back on the East Coast.

His most recent film, "Divided Loyalties," will be screened by the Cinematheque at 8 o'clock tonight in the auditorium of the San Francisco Art Institute, 800 Chestnut street, together with an earlier

(1972-1975) piece, "Rude Awakening." They are well made films, easy to like, hard to get involved in.

Both films are similar in imagery and style, but the more recent one is shorter (25 minutes) and somewhat tighter. "Divided Loyalties" is a term used by filmmakers to describe the cut that divides one shot or scene from another and, in general, Sonbert belongs to that school of filmmakers wherein editing — cutting, splicing, *collaging* — is at least three-quarters of the

game.

Both films are made up of footage (almost all of it in color) of a diaristic, home-movie content and style.

Familiar settings — the Opera House, Golden Gate Bridge — mingle with unfamiliar ones; recognizable images — Yosemite Falls, the Brooklyn Bridge — with anonymous countrysides and architectural details; ordinary scenes — city streets, trains — with extraordi-

nary ones: circuses, parades, ballerinas, boffers.

Although it is clearly controlled, the camera work has an improvisatory look that occasionally cuts loose in staccato lurches and blurred speed-ups.

The common denominator is movement. Sonbert's various visual fragments add up to a veritable encyclopedia of the different kinds and degrees of motion — natural and man-made, controlled and spontaneous, swift and gradual, abrupt and continuous, advancing and receding, erratic and flowing; buses, boats, cascades, ceramicists, aerialists, trees, carousels, roller-coasters.

When the subject is still, it is the camera itself that moves — zooming, spinning, panning from left to right, or vice versa.

Sometimes Sonbert's camera will linger until a motion verges on becoming a completed act, but most of his segments are momentary, sometimes almost subliminal, glimpses.

They are skillfully linked by movements that sometimes form startling parallels — a revolving ferris wheel followed by a basketball play that moves around the circle, the underside of a bridge slipping from right to left as the camera passes below, followed by a similar motion from a swimming duck.

Generally, the connections are less obvious — a similarity in rhythm, direction, tempo — and, occasionally, one suspects, more or less random, the images carried along by the momentum already established.

Sonbert is allied to the structuralist filmmakers in his determination to exclude those elements they regard as extrinsic to the film medium — sound, story line. But his approach is less heavy-handed and pedantically rigorous than theirs, more open-ended and lyrical.

He does not shy from juxtapositions that suggest implicit "comment": socialites debarking from limousines followed by a view of rippling water, a group of robust



A 'scene' from 'Rude Awakening': Sonbert's films are a bit like kaleidoscopes that shake up various facets of 'reality'

young men, followed by the view of a cemetery.

Indeed, his films are a bit like kaleidoscopes that shake up various facets of "reality" into a continuing array of changing patterns, which one can interpret (or not interpret) as one will.

Sonbert occasionally lapses into gratuitous mannerisms — brief, obtrusive upside-down frames — and falls into such clichés as the tracteries of light seen from amusement park rides at night.

And, after 15 minutes or so, the film ultimately suffers the same problem that afflicts so much structuralist filmmaking: They bore.

Although certain images recur to help provide continuity, there is no sense of form, of development, or even direction; like a crab, it is all joints and no backbone. Isolated from a narrative context and recast in a more abstract syntax, the images and their movement for a time acquire a certain compelling autonomy, as distinctions blur between the commonplace and the unusual, the particular and the

general.

But with no greater organizing principle that would infuse the various bits and pieces with a purpose beyond their mere succession on the screen, the viewer gradually is thrust back into "real time."

Like the revolution of a second hand around the clock, the films engage little more than the eyeball, and attention wanders; they don't end, but merely stop.

The medium is the message, perhaps, but that is like having mastered a language, and having nothing to say.

## Film From USSR

"The Miracle Tree," a Soviet Georgian film that attracted favorable critical attention at the recent film festival here, will be shown at 5 o'clock today at the Pacific Film Archive, 2621 Durant Avenue, Berkeley. The director, Tenghiz Abuladze, and the star, Sofiko Chiaureli, will introduce and discuss it.

## Bay Area Movies

C

### ALAMEDA COUNTY

**ACT ONE** Center Off Shattuck  
Berkeley, 548-7200  
NATIONAL LAMPOON'S  
"ANIMAL HOUSE" 7:00, 9:00

**ACT TWO** Center/Shattuck  
Berkeley, 548-7200  
LAST 6 DAYS!  
'A Dream Of Passion'  
7:00, 9:00  
Wed: Bergman's "Autumn Sonata"

**ALAMEDA 3** 2317 Central  
522-4433  
1. Roger Moore, Richard Harris  
Richard Burton "WILD GESE" (R)  
2. "FOUL PLAY"  
"FUN WITH DICK & JANE"  
3. "HALLOWEEN"/"CARRIE" (R)

**ALBANY** 1115 Solano Ave.  
Park Free 524-5656  
JANE FONDA JAMES CAAN  
'Comes a Horseman'  
7:00, 9:10

**BERKELEY** Shattuck at Haste  
848-4300  
"UP IN SMOKE" 8:25, 11:25  
"GUITAR PICKS & ROACH CLIPS"  
7:00, 10:00

**CALIFORNIA 3** Cinema  
Center  
Kittredge & Shattuck, Berk., 848-0620  
\* "Lord Of The Rings"  
7:00, 9:25  
\* "PARADISE ALLEY"  
With Sylvester Stallone 7:00, 9:00  
\* "GIRL FRIENDS"  
ENDS TUES: 7:15, 9:15

**CENTURYS** Nimitz Fwy.  
Oak., 562-9990  
\* "MIDNIGHT EXPRESS" (R) 8:05  
"TAXI DRIVER" (R) 6:9:55  
\* "UP IN SMOKE" (R) 8:15  
"WHICH WAY IS UP?" (R)  
6:30, 9:55

**CINEMA 1,2,3** Hayward  
783-2601  
Southland Center Nimitz at Winton  
Bargain Mat Til 2 PM or Capacity

### UA 4 CINEMAS

2274 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, 843-1487  
1. "Death on the Nile"  
(PG) 1:30, 4:15, 7:00, 9:45  
2. "Midnight Express"  
(R) 1:00, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, 10:00  
3. "Boys From Brazil" (R)  
2:00, 4:30, 7:00, 9:30  
4. "HALLOWEEN" (R)  
1:30-5:00-8:30 "THEATRE OF  
BLOOD" (R) 3:05, 6:35, 10:05

**UC** University & Shattuck Berkeley  
843-6267  
"SEBASTIANE" 9:00  
"MAITRESSE" 7/10:45  
Tmwr: 'Renaldo & Clara'

### CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

**CAPRI** 1653 Willow Pass  
Concord, 687-4130  
"THE BIG FIX" 6:05, 10:25  
"AMERICAN GRAFFITI" 8:15

**CENTURY Complex**  
Freeway 680, Pleasant Hill, 687-1100  
\* "BOYS FROM BRAZIL" (R)  
7:00, 9:30  
\* "PARADISE ALLEY" (PG)  
6:00, 8:10, 10:20  
\* "COMES A HORSEMAN" (PG)  
7:15, 9:30  
\* National Lampoon's "ANIMAL  
HOUSE" (R) 7:45, 9:45  
\* "FOUL PLAY" (PG) 7:50  
"GOIN COCONUTS" (PG)  
6:00, 10:00

**CINEMA** Walnut Creek  
935-3770  
"INSERTS"  
8:35 "MUSTANG" 7:15, 10:35  
TMW: "Martin & The Crazyes"  
Fri, Sat midnite: "ROCKY HORROR"

**CINEMAS Sunvalley**  
Lower Mall, Concord 687-7660  
BARG MAT. DAILY 'TIL 2!  
1. "WILD GESE" (R)  
1:45, 4:30, 7:10, 9:30  
2. "MIDNIGHT EXPRESS" (R)  
1:55, 4:45, 7:20, 9:40

### NORTHGATE

San Rafael  
472-1242  
"DEATH ON THE NILE"  
7:00, 9:40

**NOVATO** 920 Grant Ave.  
892-2424  
"GROOVE TUBE"  
7:00, 9:55  
"Sex With A Smile"  
8:25 RATED R

**PLAYHOUSE** Tiburon  
435-1234  
Chabrol's "VIOLETTE"  
7:00, 9:10  
Next: "Autumn Sonata"

**RAFAEL** San Rafael  
453-5441  
"HALLOWEEN" 8:20  
"THE MEDUSA TOUCH" 6:30-10

**SEQUOIA** Mill Valley  
388-4862  
1. "WILD GESE" 9:10  
"THE BETSY" 7:00  
2. "INTERIORS" 7:00, 10:20  
"THE FRONT" 8:40

**TAMALPAIS** San Anselmo  
453-5442  
"COMES A HORSEMAN"  
7:00, 9:10

### SAN MATEO COUNTY

**BELMONT THREE** El Camino  
591-5349  
RICHARD DREYFUSS IN  
"THE BIG FIX" (PG) 6-8-10  
Melina Mercouri-Ellen Burstyn  
"A Dream of Passion"  
(R) 6:15, 8:15, 10:15  
JACK NICHOLSON IN  
"GOIN SOUTH" (PG)  
6:30, 8:30, 10:25

**GUILD** El Camino Real  
Menlo Pk., 323-6760  
The Best Film In TEN YEARS!  
"MIDNIGHT EXPRESS" (R)  
6-8-15-10:30  
NOW AT PARK THEATRE  
"DREAM OF PASSION"

### OLD MILL 6

Mt. View  
948-1116  
Central Expwy. at San Antonio  
Reduced adult & student Prices  
For (TLS) (Tw-Lite Show)—  
Tickets for TLS on Sale 45 Minutes  
Prior to Show—Limited to seating

1. "BOYS FROM BRAZIL" (R)  
(TLS 5:45), 8:30  
2. "PARADISE ALLEY" (PG)  
(TLS 5:15), 7:30, 9:45  
3. "WATERSHIP DOWN" (PG)  
(TLS 5:30), 7:30, 9:30  
4. "THE BIG FIX" (PG)  
(TLS 5:15), 7:30, 9:45  
5. "ANIMAL HOUSE" (R)  
(TLS 5:15), 7:30, 9:45  
6. "UP IN SMOKE" (R) (TLS 6:15),  
9:25 "GROOVE TUBE" (R) 8

**PALO Alto Sq. 1&II**  
3000 El Camino Real, P. Alto 493-1160  
"DEATH ON THE NILE"  
7:00, 9:30  
"WHO'S KILLING THE GREAT CHEFS  
OF EUROPE" 7:30, 9:30  
Barg Mat. Sat.-Sun. 'Til 2

### SONOMA COUNTY

**PLAZA** Petaluma  
763-7171  
"CAT & MOUSE" 8:50 "MAD  
ADVENTURES OF RABBI  
JACOB" 7:00 and 10:40

### DRIVE-IN MOVIES

•• ALAMEDA COUNTY ••

**COLISEUM 3** Oakland  
536-7491  
\* "HALLOWEEN" (R)  
"CARRIE" (R)  
\* "BOYS FROM BRAZIL" (R)  
"WILD GESE" (R)  
\* "THINK DIRTY" (R)  
"GROOVE TUBE" (R)

**UNION CITY 4** Union City  
471-5144  
\* "MIDNIGHT EXPRESS" (R)  
"AMSTERDAM KILL" (R)  
\* "HALLOWEEN" (R) "CARRIE" (R)  
\* "UP IN SMOKE" (R)  
"CHOIRBOYS" (R)  
\* National Lampoon's "ANIMAL  
HOUSE" (R)